

NEW SOUTH WALES TRAWL WHITING HARVEST STRATEGY WORKING GROUP

3rd. MEETING VIDEO CONFERENCING 17 DECEMBER 2020

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

The meeting received a presentation by Dr. Jemery Day, CSIRO, which covered the desirable contents of a harvest strategy and the use of models to undertake stock assessments. The models rely on the use of multiple sources of data, including CPUE, catch, age and length series, discards etc., to obtain a "best fit" of the model to the data. With a shared stock like Eastern School Whiting, the data sources come from a number of jurisdictions and it is important that the quantity and quality of the data is constantly improved to increase the confidence in the model outcomes.

The models have been refined over time to take account of the five different data series covering the different fishing methods for the species and with changes in assumptions about operations over time. For the current stock assessment, NSW data has been included for the first time in the Commonwealth assessment.

The stock assessment outcomes for 2020 are still being processed through AFMA's committees and are yet to be considered by AFMA itself.

Following the presentation, the meeting turned its attention to a number of key decisions on which the draft harvest strategy would be based. Again, given the short timeframe to develop a comprehensive harvest strategy, it was decided to concentrate on those aspects which would be relevant to the TAC setting process early in 2021. The meeting agreed to formally draft advice to the TAF Committee covering the areas of Fishery Indicators, Reference Points and some Decision Rules.

These areas are central to a draft Harvest Strategy and although they will be discussed further at the next meeting, it was resolved that biomass estimates would be the main Fishery Indicator. With respect to Reference Points, it was agreed that the Limit Reference Point would be B₂₀ which represents reaching a biomass of 20% of the virgin stock, or unfished biomass, within the fishery. A decision rule or harvest control rule would then require management action to be taken to rebuild these stocks. It was acknowledged that this same limit applies in both the Commonwealth and Queensland harvest strategies.

Considerable debate then ensued about the setting of a Target Reference Point. It was noted that other harvest strategies had targets which varied from biomass estimates of 40% to 60% and some in-between, depending on which objective the harvest strategy was trying to achieve. Further discussion on this was deferred until the next meeting.

With respect to Decision Rules, the Group was supportive of developing a Decision Rule which imposed limits on the year-on-year changes to quotas, particularly in cases where they may be decreasing, so that the industry could better plan their future activities. This will also be elaborated on at the next meeting in mid-January, along with other possible decision rules.

Peter Neville

CHAIR, TWHS WORKING GROUP 18/12/2020